



The Politics of Police Reform in 20th Century Northern Ireland

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In the past hundred years, the six counties composing modern-day Northern Ireland have seen three major overhauls of their police and security forces during periods of intense civil strife and political violence. Perhaps more so than that of any place in the modern western world, the region's history highlights the deep entanglement of civil tranquility and a state's ability to exercise control in a manner seen as legitimate by its citizens.

During a three-week trip to the United Kingdom this summer, I examined thousands of pages of government files documenting the intense processes of fact-finding and political negotiation, which preceded and shaped the passing of each of these reform packages. My goal, using these documents, is to piece together a comprehensive picture of the people, interests, priorities, and ideologies which affected the trajectory of policing this deeply divided and conflict-plagued state. In doing so, I hope to shed light on how the unfolding of the Troubles' thirty years of conflict was shaped by political maneuvering, and how politics, policing, and peace interact more generally amidst a background of violent civil conflict.

The opportunity to conduct hands-on research with primary archival material, some of which has not been examined by scholars since its creation, has been a truly unique experience that is very different from any other work I have done while at Penn. As a history student, it is wonderful to feel that I am really conducting the kind of original scholarship that I interact with only in a secondhand manner in the classroom. I have gained a much stronger understanding of how the practice of academic history is truly carried out. I will certainly be returning to the classroom this fall with a new and valuable insight into the discipline.